



Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
Testimony of Lee Schlesinger, Executive Director
Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury
Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing Re: Governor's Proposed FY 2018-2019 Budget
Thursday, February 23, 2017

Good Evening Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this evening. My name is Lee Schlesinger; I am the Executive Director of Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury, one of the nine community-based member centers of the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence. First of all, I want to thank you for all of the hard work you are undertaking on this difficult budget.

As a dual agency, Safe Haven provides supportive services to survivors of domestic and sexual violence in the Greater Waterbury area. All of our services are free of charge and include an emergency shelter, 24-hour crisis intervention, individual and group counseling, legal advocacy (both criminal and civil), accompaniment, and community collaborations. Safe Haven has a strong and welcome presence in both the civil and criminal courts in Waterbury. We also have collaborative relationships within state agencies such as the Department of Children and Families ("DCF") and the Department of Developmental Services ("DDS"). It is our mission to provide inclusive services to all who require our support. On an annual basis, we provide direct services to more than 500 individuals in just the sexual assault program.

In addition to the services listed above we also provide community education and presentations to professionals. Our community education program is currently staffed by one individual. This person does it all from police trainings to presentations in elementary schools and high schools, to professional groups and everything in between. In the last fiscal year, our community educator presented to over 12,000 individuals. She is an asset to this organization and while she works hard she is only one person who is extremely stretched.

With the implementation of Public Act 14-196, which requires schools to deliver lessons about sexual assault and abuse awareness and prevention for all grades K-12 there is a higher demand for our programs in the public school system in Waterbury and the other 11 municipalities in our service area. In fact, the demand is so high that we are facing the need to expand our community education program. As you know, expanding any program requires funding and while that funding may not come directly from the state of Connecticut, any further cuts in our funding regardless of the source, could have a crippling effect on our expansion efforts and cause a disservice to the communities that we proudly and compassionately serve daily. We recently successfully expanded our reach by hiring a college advocate to work with the three college campuses that we have in our service area. This new addition has worked out very well and we are now able to serve a population that we were previously unable to effectively reach. The growth of our programs is an indication that our services are needed

now more than ever. In addition to our education and prevention work on college campuses and in the public schools, Safe Haven advocates also work within several interdisciplinary teams such as the Child Abuse Interdisciplinary Team ("C.A.I.T.") and the Fatherhood Engagement and Leadership Team ("F.E.L.T.").

Safe Haven would not be able to accomplish all we do without the generous support of our community and our state legislators. The governor's budget recognizes the continued need for front line sexual assault crisis services and programs throughout our state. We respectfully ask that as you work to uphold the state's longstanding commitment to its residents to address sexual violence that you keep the funding for rape crisis intervention and prevention services at their current level.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration in this matter. I recognize that you have the very difficult task of addressing the state budget deficit. I trust you will do what is best for the residents of the state of Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Lee Schlesinger
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